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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: PM, MINISTER CRITICIZE STATE OF ISLAMIC WORLD

Classified by A/DCM James R. Moore; reasons 1.4 b and d.

1. (U) Summary: PM Erdogan and State Minister Aydin recently made public statements criticizing the state of the Islamic world and calling on Muslims to uphold the values of their faith. Using strikingly similar language, the GOT leaders said the Islamic world lags behind the West in terms of social justice; asserted that Muslims need to look at themselves to find the cause of their problems; and urged Muslims to do more to uphold the values promoted by their religion, such as justice, peace, morality, and knowledge. They also said Muslims need to examine why the world associates Islam with terrorism. End Summary.

PM Addresses Eurasian Meeting

2. (U) PM Erdogan on September 5 delivered a speech at the 6th Eurasian Islamic Council meeting in Istanbul in which he called on Muslims to take responsibility for their problems and strive to uphold the values of their faith. "If oppression is rampant in the Islamic world, if the word 'Muslim' is used in the same sentence with the word 'terrorist' anywhere in the world, if any one of us leaves an orphan hungry and without shelter, and if a person dies of hunger, then we must first look at ourselves and make an accounting," Erdogan said.

3. (U) Erdogan told audience members they belonged to a religion promoting "justice against oppression, human rights against the use of force, peace against conflict, moral values against materialism, science and knowledge against ignorance, morals against ambition, and generosity against selfishness." The problems of the world today stem from a failure to uphold these values. The Islamic nations of Eurasia, he averred, can find the solutions to these problems in their cultural/historical roots.

4. (U) Erdogan further indicated that the Islamic world has a history of tolerance toward other religions. He acknowledged that in recent times some Muslims may have taken actions that undermined this tradition. Muslims must address this by "strengthening goodness, beauty, and brotherhood." If the Islamic world today is failing to uphold the values of Islam, he said, it is largely the fault of its politicians. "The burden we are shouldering is heavy," he stated.

Aydin Gives Press Interview

5. (U) State Minister Aydin, as if speaking from shared talking points, made strikingly similar comments in an interview with the newspaper Milliyet, published September 8. Aydin, who oversees the GOT's Religious Affairs Directorate, called the state of social justice in the Islamic world "pathetic" and said Muslims must "courageously admit" that the West has done a better job of implementing certain values. At the same time, he opined that the West should adopt a less condescending approach to the Islamic world. "Nobody should lecture another about justice and respect for human dignity," he said, "That would be shameful."

6. (U) Like the PM, Aydin also urged Muslims to think about why Islam today is associated with terrorism. "It means that we have not been successful," he said. He also asserted that Islam promotes tolerance among religions. "The Holy Koran centuries ago stated that each person's religion is sacred for that person. There is no need for us to fight because we have different religions," he said.

7. (U) Aydin also directly addressed the issue of gender discrimination in the Islamic world. He noted that when he was a child, many believed that girls did not need to attend school. The situation has improved since then -- today there are campaigns (note: in Turkey) aimed at encouraging girls to go to school. Still, he said, Muslims have not done enough to encourage a re-interpretation of their religion. Many "archaic" beliefs remain widespread.

Comment

18. (C) This is a different rhetoric than we have heard before. So far they are words, not deeds - but they are words uttered in country - not abroad, for consumption by a Western audience. It is not clear to what extent Erdogan and Aydin meant to include Turkey in their critical analysis of the Islamic world, but it is worth noting that high-level GOT leaders are now taking this approach. Erdogan in the past has not been willing to examine the relationship between Islam and terrorism -- he has said repeatedly that the term "Islamic terrorism" made his "blood boil." As a result, his latest speech marks more than a subtle shift in emphasis.

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